



The Big Five

What's at Stake for Women and the Nation

Queers Descend Upon Denver to Create Change

February 4, 2008 posted by Kyla Bender-Baird

I spent this weekend in Denver, CO at the 21st Annual National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Conference for LGBT Equality (aka "Creating Change"). As Kate Clinton warned, I am recovering from the shock of re-entry into the "real world" where, in fact, not everyone is queer—nor even an ally (bummer). This was the second year I was able to attend this fabulous conference where thousands of LGBT activists gather to network, build coalitions, and share tips on how to create change. And I gotta tell ya—I'm hooked!

Since I skipped the day-long institutes, my first Creating Change event was Dolores Huerta: "We Have Arrived!" Dolores Huerta co-founded United Farm Workers of American with Cesar Chavez. She immediately caught my attention when she stated that the minimum wage should be no less than \$25/hour. Now that's what I call a living wage! Huerta further captured my heart when she said, "**We need to educate ourselves about each other's movements and organizations.**"

Part of the reason I love and appreciate NGLTF and its annual conference is the **focus on social justice and coalition building.** This was evident in the diversity of workshops I was able to attend in just three days. The first day alone I attended a caucus on sex workers where we discussed the difference between trafficking and sex work and the importance of educating people on the difference; a workshop on two-spirit identities; and the presentation of new research on gender variant students of color.

Rea Carey's "State of the Movement" really drove home the importance of reaching outside the LGBT movement. According to Rea, the movement is "engaged, resilient, and expansive." However, the "time for isolating ourselves as a movement is over." Fortunately, the conference offered many issues around which to form coalitions. A workshop on using research for advocacy suggested healthcare as an issue that could be a rallying point for a wide variety of interests. The fabulous HIV/AIDS plenary on Saturday (seriously one of the most inspirational panels I've ever attended) pointed out that **the economic struggle is an AIDS issue.**

As a researcher, I was of course overjoyed by the widespread recognition of the importance of research throughout the conference. The workshop on gender variant students of color pointed out that activists need compelling data to advocate for change. And in her state of the movement address, Rea declared "**it is not 'politically correct' to conduct sound research...**" in response to criticisms of the recent Proposition 8 study issued by NGTLF's Policy Institute.

The standout moment of the conference for me was an aside Rea Carey made on Saturday before presenting Robyn Ochs with an award for activism. In an encouraging demonstration of leadership, Rea emphasized the inclusion of bisexual folk in the LGBT movement, stating that "**If any one of us is invisible, we are all invisible.**" This statement moved me on a personal

level—as a bisexual woman—and on a political level. Last year our community was torn apart by the ENDA fiasco; this year it was the post-Proposition 8 scapegoating of communities of color. I am hopeful that with such conscientious leadership, we can find cohesion as an LGBT community and as part of a larger social justice movement.